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Appendix C: Brief Description of the Current MIS

APPENDIX C

To place the MIS in perspective historically, the original published paper which came out in 1964 was entitled "Proposal for The Establishment of An Automated Time and Work Reporting System." In the early stages of development of the MIS, what was called the "total systems concept," at that time a very in-vogue buzz-phrase, was often invoked and unfortunately misinterpreted, at least within NPIC, to mean that all that had to be done was to file or computerize every bit of conceivably relevant information which, in turn, could be combined in any way in the output to satisfy all information needs. In certain cases, management was told and believed this tale which, needless to say, proved to be untrue. And when it proved to be untrue in practice, naturally there was a good deal of justified resentment, disappointment, and disenchantment with the MIS and computer-based information systems in general. These feelings have persisted and today detract from the potential utility of the MIS in a number of ways, running the gamut from affecting accuracy of input to unfounded criticism of the system and reluctance to use it. It is perhaps an understatement to say that there is a credibility gap with respect to the current MIS. Actually, in its current configuration, the system is very much in line with the title of the original paper--an automated time and work reporting system, nothing more, nothing less. It is indeed unfortunate that so much misunderstanding as to the system's purpose and capabilities was created in the past and so much harmful oversell promulgated not only internally but also externally to the Center; for example, at Headquarters, the Bureau of the Budget, and elsewhere.

The MIS records the time spent by personnel (and generates dollar equivalents) in satisfying external and internal requests for products or services or in performing the routine activities of their organizational unit. These distributions can be examined from various viewpoints, such as allocation of effort among the Center's major tasks, timeliness of project completion as compared with requested or "deadline" date, the expenditure of time against discrete projects, and so forth. In addition, since much information about a project is stored in the basic project "account"; e.g., requester, products, country or area, priority/weight, title, etc., the MIS also performs a project library function along with the basic time recording task.

The project request, once it has been accepted by the Requirements and Analysis Division and estimated and scheduled by the Production Management Board, becomes the basis for the establishment of a project

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"account" in the MIS. This unique account number, the project number, designates the major type of work being done, and the other descriptors (title, requester, etc.) indicate certain characteristics pertinent to the request. The final requirement is translated into a format compatible with the MIS and is prepared for keypunching by the Systems Integration Staff of AID. Each week the basic file is updated by adding new data to current projects, changing data on current projects as appropriate, adding new projects, and closing completed projects.

As the basic project account is being established in the computer system, xeroxed copies of the original requirements are disseminated to those components that will participate in the project; the project number is then transmitted to the individuals who will do the actual work. As employees work on the project, they record the specific activities undertaken against the project and the time expended for each activity. This recording mechanism is the weekly time sheet filled out by each employee; in addition to employee name, badge number, component, and grade, all projects worked on during the week are recorded, along with the specific activities and manhours for each project and certain other "overhead" activities, such as leave, training, etc.

On Monday mornings, the time sheets of all employees are collected by designated persons and delivered to the Systems Integration Staff. On the following Tuesday and Wednesday, the new data is edited, keypunched, and verified and corrected; normally on Thursday the magnetic tape containing the main file is updated. On Friday, when the updated file is ready to be queried, the regular and ad-hoc MIS reports are printed out. The PMB has an additional program that reads the updated file, performs some scheduling computations, and prints out the results.

In addition to the time sheet data, two other forms containing data elements are transmitted to AID as required, but usually daily. These are added to the main file during the weekly updates. One, the work phase notice, primarily signals the start and finish dates for a project in each component; the other is used to report product information against a specific project.

The major data elements comprising the current MIS are:

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1. Organizational Element -- Group, Staff, Division, Branch, Section.
2. Personnel -- Badge number, grade, name.
3. Project Time -- Regular time, overtime, and dollar equivalents.
4. Activity (Skill) Code
5. Project Title
6. Project Priority/Weight
7. Project Number
8. Project Country/Geographic Area
9. Project Category Code -- Indicator of specific type of project.
10. Project Requester -- Organization levying request.
11. Security Classification of Project Requirement Form
12. Project Begin Date (by Component)
13. Project Deadline (or Estimated Completion) Date (by Component)
14. Actual Completion/Cancellation Date (by Component)
15. Project Product Code -- Numbers of discrete output items produced under the project number.

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